ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN'S ISSUES
CONSEIL CONSULTATIF DE L'ONTARIO SUR LA CONDITION FÉMININE

BRIEF TO THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT

ON SOLE SUPPORT MOTHERS

NOVEMBER 1987

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ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN'S ISSUES
CONSEIL CONSULTATIF DE L'ONTARIO SUR LA CONDITION FÉMININE
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Honourable Gregory Sorbara
Minister Responsible for Women's Issues
Parliament Buildings,
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario

Dear Mr. Sorbara,

Between January and June, 1987 members of the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues travelled throughout the province to meet with sole support mothers to learn about the numerous problems they face and discuss possible solutions.

On June 19 & 20, 1987, Council held a major conference in Toronto entitled, **Sole Support M.O.M: Mothers On the Move**. With the assistance of an advisory committee, Council developed an agenda to give sole support mothers an opportunity to define their concerns. The conference consisted of speakers, presentations, films and most important discussion sessions. It was at these sessions that the sole support mothers actively took part in the recommendation process. Sharing their stories, their concerns and their goals for the future, sole support mothers worked together with Council members and session facilitators to develop these recommendations.

Council is pleased to present our final recommendations to you as Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. We are confident you will review these with your cabinet colleagues and that the Ontario government will take steps to remedy the injustices these women face in their day to day lives.

Sincerely,

Sandra Kerr

Sandra Kerr
Vice-President

c.c. Premier Peterson
Honourable John Sweeney,
Community and Social Services
Honourable Chaviva Hosek, Housing
Social Assistance Review Committee
Other Appropriate Ministries

THE ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

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RECEPTIONIST, DAPHNE HAY

*Denotes Council members whose term ended prior to November 1987.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

ABORIGINAL SOLE SUPPORT MOTHERS

1. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government consult with aboriginal women to develop a co-ordination of resources at the regional and community level.

2. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government increase the development and availability of aboriginal-oriented social, vocational, economic and cultural programs and resources in the community.

3. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government establish aboriginal women's centres particularly in communities with a high concentration of aboriginal sole support mothers, to operate as store-front services providing life skills, pre-employment counselling, career planning, job training, placement services and post-employment counselling.

4. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government facilitate the development of self-help groups for aboriginal sole support mothers to deal with such issues as life skills, health care, personal growth, nutrition, child rearing etc...

5. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government establish alcohol and drug treatment centres with childcare services, culturally appropriate treatment programs and programs geared to the needs of aboriginal women.

6. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government establish multi-purpose residential centres to provide treatment and educational services designed to meet the needs of aboriginal women and their families.

7. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government provide Community Employment Facilitators (for aboriginal communities), to determine the local labour forces employment strategies such as training programs, and economic development initiatives.

ADDICTIONS

8. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that more treatment and detox centres for women be funded and established in various regions of Ontario.

9. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that childcare be made available to women using treatment and detox centres.

10. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government fund the development of addiction treatment centres specifically for teen alcoholics with children.

11. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that every agency dealing with sole support mothers have the appropriate information and the knowledge to deal with addictions.

ADEQUACY OF INCOME

12. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the current social assistance system be revised to build in adequate employment incentive programs for sole support mothers, by:

    (i) increasing the earnings limit per month to reflect the number of children in the family and the standard of living in each region;

    (ii) introducing a program so that sole support mothers can gradually be taken off social assistance (ie. receive medical benefits, full housing subsidy, employment related expenses, subsidy for childcare, transportation allowance etc...).

13. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government negotiate with the federal government to make child support payments non-taxable.

BATTERED WOMEN

14. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government ensure that services for psychologically abused women and children are made available by increasing funds to transition houses specifically for this purpose.

15. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government provide funds to ensure that mandatory counselling for batterers is implemented.

16. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Solicitor General establish Domestic Response Units across the province.

17. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that provincially funded programs be established to educate health care workers to better understand experiences battered women face.

18. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that more broadly based training programs for police officers in the area of spousal assault, be implemented.

CHILDCARE

19. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that all hospitals, community centres, schools, universities, colleges and businesses be encouraged through financial incentives, to provide on-site childcare services.

20. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government fund and/or subsidize the development of 24 hour childcare centres.

21. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that more spaces for infants be made available in childcare centres.

22. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that businesses be encouraged through financial incentives, to provide time off for the illness of a child.

23. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government provide funding for childcare services to on-going support groups through grants or subsidies.

24. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government develop childcare programs for ill children. The program could be modelled after services that are currently available, such as "chicken soup" in the United States.

EDUCATION

25. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that barriers to education for sole support mothers receiving O.S.A.P be removed by:

(i) increasing the grant limit;

(ii) removing the restrictions on the grant eligibility periods;

(iii) not penalizing part-time students by inappropriate use of grant eligibility periods and for having attended post secondary institutions in the past;**

(iv) the expansion of entry level support programs for mature students offering information on time management, student work skills such as exam writing, reading skills, essay preparation, library resources and so on.**

26. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities keep social workers and community relations workers up-to-date on educational programs so that the information can be passed on to their client group.

27. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the new Spousal Support Payment Enforcement act be publicized to the appropriate people through the media, social workers, community relations workers, legal aid clinics or be included with FBA and GWA cheques.

28. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that legal information be publicized on a very basic level and be made available through social agencies, courts, legal aid clinics, the Attorney General, media campaigns, the ministries of Housing and Community and Social Services etc...

29. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that social workers be provided with a variety of information pamphlets, such as addiction awareness, community resources, educational upgrading etc... which are likely to be of assistance to sole support mothers.

30. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that a major education campaign be established using every possible medium, especially television, on issues relating to alcohol and drug addiction, abuse, illiteracy, upgrading education, self-help groups etc...

31. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities work together to ensure that sole support mothers are made fully aware of all educational options available to them, through:

    (i) information mailings with FBA cheques;

    (ii) a combined newsletter outlining educational opportunities available to sole support mothers.

EMPLOYMENT

32. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Community and Social Services re-examine the phase out policy for the Social Services Employment Program.

33. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Community and Social Services take immediate action to increase the earnings limit per month for sole support mothers on social assistance to reflect the number of children in the family and the standard of living in each region.

34. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Community and Social Services recognize the monetary difficulties for sole support mothers during the transition period from social assistance to employment and continue benefit coverage, housing subsidy, adding transportation allowance etc...

35. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Community and Social Services expand the Social Services Employment Program to include agencies that are in receipt of <u>any</u> government funding and that this program be extended to the private sector.

HEALTH

36. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that vitamins and other food supplements essential to health maintenance be covered by the Drug Benefit Plan.

37. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government take immediate action to increase the $20 pregnancy supplement to welfare cheques to reflect the high costs associated with child bearing.

38. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that dental coverage include anaesthetics, x-rays, root canals etc...

39. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that at least as much money for health promotion/wellness and disease prevention be allocated as is for dealing with illness (in general) in our society.

40. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that mental health services in isolated areas in Ontario be improved to better respond to the varying needs of all women.

41. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government increase funding in the program areas of prevention in public health, family support and child welfare services.

HOUSING

42. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that a complete review of Ontario Housing policies be implemented with tenant involvement (similar to the Social Assistance Review Committee).

43. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that social assistance payments have a higher shelter component and that it reflect the cost of housing in each specific region.

44. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that subsidized housing units be established in private apartment buildings.

45. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that subsidies be based on net income and not gross income.

46. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that single mothers not be evicted from Ontario Housing when their youngest child reaches 18 years of age and is out of school.

47. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that consideration be taken when choosing the location of new Ontario Housing developments to ensure that they are not constructed in areas close to hazardous chemicals and pollutants.

48. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that co-op childcare centres be established within public housing complexes.

49. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that single mothers qualify for public housing as soon as pregnancy is detected.

50. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that community relations workers facilitate the development of residential tenants groups to ensure cleanliness, maintenance, upkeep, regular spraying, etc... of public housing buildings.

51. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that care be taken to ensure that ghettoizing does not occur in low rental and public housing complexes.

52. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that free laundry facilities be provided within public housing complexes.

53. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that community relations workers be given lighter caseloads to reinforce a more positive relationship with their client group.

54. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that community relations workers facilitate the development of self-help groups, information sessions etc...

55. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that first and last months' rent be part of the housing subsidy in social assistance cheques.

OPENING THE LINES OF COMMUNICATIONS

56. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the relationship between social service workers and clients be positively reinforced by:**

(i) income maintenance workers receiving reduced workloads/caseloads and in turn completing mandatory training to upgrade skills and program information;

(ii) more effective service to native clients by the hiring and training of native staff in income maintenance services;

(iii) more effective service to clients with differing cultural backgrounds by the hiring and training of multi-cultural staff in income maintenance services.

57. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that communication between the social assistance delivery system and clients regarding eligibility and programs be improved. This may be accomplished by bulletins for newsletters mailed with GWA and FBA cheques, availability of workshops, central phone numbers, and complete information packages for clients.**

58. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government establish a hotline to deal with enquiries from sole support mothers.

STEREOTYPING

59. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government fund a campaign to increase the social awareness and educate the public in regard to the realities of life for sole support mothers.

60. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that judges, lawyers, doctors and other professional disciplines be educated about all women, including, sole support mothers, lesbian women, disabled women, immigrant and visible minority women, aboriginal women and that principals, teachers, daycare workers etc... be trained to deal with the special emotional and social needs of children of sole support mothers.

61. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the CRTC continue its commitment to eliminate sex-role stereotyping in all media.

TRANSITION HOUSES

62. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Community and Social Services take immediate action to build second stage housing across the province.

63. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Community and Social Services provide funding to build more shelters to reflect the number of women and children who seek help.

64. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that transition houses receive increased funding so that counselling services for children can be available.

65. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that a clear definition of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Community and Social Services in this area be established.

**Denotes recommendations taken from the report of the Advisory Group of Sole Support Parents to the Social Assistance Review Committee.

SUPPLEMENTARY RECOMMENDATIONS

During our consultations and conference Council heard numerous recommendations that addressed the needs of all women and not just sole support mothers.

The fact that a few of the following recommendations are already implemented to some extent, suggests that these programs are not effectively reaching the women who require the services.

IMMIGRANT AND VISIBLE MINORITY SOLE SUPPORT MOTHERS

66. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ontario Human Rights Commission expand and enrich their services to aboriginal women and immigrant and visible minority women by providing advocacy services to bring forth discrimination cases and to provide an outreach program that will assist in promoting their services to women.

67. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Education and various professional boards review the criteria for assessing the credentials and training of professional immigrant women so they are able to work in their fields in Canada. Further, that there be consideration of cultural differences in doing this assessment.

68. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ontario Human Rights Commission provide training to their own staff to sensitize them to racism and immigrant stereotypes;

69. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that all government ministries establish annual multi-cultural training and communication sessions for all staff levels.

70. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Education increase its curriculum content on the history, heritage and contribution of multi-cultural groups.

EDUCATION AND STEREOTYPING

71. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that there be an education campaign to encourage women to learn about their rights, i.e. wills, guardianship, divorce, abuse etc... This should be available in a variety of languages.

72. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that sex-role stereotyping be eliminated at all levels of education.

73. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the media develop awareness and sensitivity to the issues of disabled women.

74. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that women's studies and women's health issues be taught in elementary schools.

75. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that more courses for training in non-traditional occupations be made available in Northern Ontario.

76. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that sex-education classes be expanded to include: self-esteem, life-skills, goals, budgeting, rape, incest etc...

77. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that media literacy instruction be mandatory for all school boards, beginning in the primary grades.

78. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Education include disabled issues as a component of professional training.

79. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that courses dealing with birth control, literacy, continuing education, parenting, family responsibilities, be part of the educational agenda beginning in grade 7 and that these courses be mandatory for <u>all</u> students, female and male.

HEALTH

80. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that there be more public education programs on the link between addictions and abuse, loneliness, pressures at home and on the job.

81. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Health fund more research into family dynamics and child development when the mother is disabled.

82. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that illiteracy be recognized as a health issue and that information services be made available to women who cannot read.

83. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that doctors and dentists recognize special women's health issues, i.e. that women experience different stresses than men and the link between health and violence in the home.

84. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Health provide a list of all resources on drug and alcohol addictions and that this be made available at schools, universities, libraries etc...

85. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that there be more cultural sensitivity in decisions made regarding which health practitioners are covered under OHIP and which medicines are paid for through the drug benefit plan, considering that the North American definition of health care can be alien to new Canadians. (i.e. OHIP coverage of Chinese herbalists, massage therapists and acupuncturists and that drug benefit cover medicinal herbalists etc...).

86. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that controls on toxic substances and industrial pollutants be tightened, especially in those areas close to residential zones.

87. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government press the federal government to remove pregnancy from the "illness" category of Unemployment Insurance forms.

88. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that information pamphlets referring to women's health issues be printed and available in a variety of languages.

89. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Ministry of Health recognize that health promotion means not only recommending more exercise and better eating habits, but also improved working and living conditions and a clean environment.

CHILDCARE

90. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that flexible subsidized childcare be established for students taking night courses (on-site or an allowance).

91. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that income tax regulations be re-examined to permit deduction of childcare costs while looking for employment.

HOUSING

92. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the government fund central storage facilities for women who are in a transition house to store their possessions.

TRANSPORTATION

93. The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government recognize the high cost of transportation in Ontario, by:

    (i) allotting a transportation allowance to women whose earnings are below the poverty line;

    (ii) building more bicycle paths to encourage the use of bicycles as an alternate form of transportation.

ABORIGINAL SOLE SUPPORT MOTHERS

The majority of the off-reserve aboriginal population are single parent families. The aboriginal sole support mother usually leaves the reserve without material possessions, arrives in an unfamiliar urban environment and is unprepared for the lifestyle and the cultural and language barriers that exist.

The loss of extended family and friends compounds the severe loneliness and isolation many aboriginal women experience.

A substantial number of (aboriginal) families are victims of physical and sexual abuse and are dealing with problems related to alcohol and/or drug addictions.

Many aboriginal women have a lower academic level than average, do not possess marketable skills or relevant training experience and are unable to compete in a competitive job market.

Existing social service agencies are ill-equipped to adequately reach out and provide services to aboriginal families. Programs are culturally inappropriate, agency staff are unable to communicate effectively due to the language barrier and have a lack of understanding or sensitivity to aboriginal people.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that the provincial government consult with aboriginal women to develop a co-ordination of resources at the regional and community level;

that the provincial government increase the development and availability of aboriginal-oriented social, vocational, economic and cultural programs and resources in the community;

that the provincial government establish aboriginal women's centres particularly in communities with a high concentration of aboriginal sole support mothers, to operate as store-front services providing life skills, pre-employment counselling, career planning, job training, placement services and post-employment counselling;

that the provincial government facilitate the development of self-help groups for aboriginal sole support mothers to deal with such issues as life skills, health care, personal growth, nutrition, child rearing, etc.;

that the provincial government establish alcohol and drug treatment centres with childcare services, culturally appropriate treatment programs and programs geared to the needs of aboriginal women;

that the provincial government establish multi-purpose residential centres to provide treatment and educational services designed to meet the needs of aboriginal women and their families;

that the provincial government provide Community Employment Facilitators (for aboriginal communities) to determine the local labour forces employment strategies such as training programs and economic development initiatives.

ADDICTIONS

In Ontario there are inadequate numbers of addiction treatment centres for women. As well, existing ones are often inaccessible.

All-women detox centres are scarce. There are none in northwestern Ontario and very few throughout the rest of the province. Women are hesitant to enter co-ed detox centres and therefore, in many areas of Ontario, women are left with few options.

The lack of childcare is a barrier for women wanting to enter detox and treatment centres. Women are often deterred from seeking help if it means they must surrender their children to the Childrens' Aid Society.

In addition, many treatment and detox centres that do exist are often inaccessible to women due to geographic location and lack of appropriate language services.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that more treatment and detox centres for women be funded and established in various regions of Ontario;

that childcare be made available to women using treatment and detox centres;

that the government fund the development of addiction treatment centres specifically for teen alcoholics with children;

that every agency dealing with sole support mothers have the appropriate information and the knowledge to deal with addictions.

ADEQUACY OF INCOME

Current levels of social assistance are inadequate. The incentive program to encourage sole support mothers to be gainfully employed does not work because the maximum (allowable) earnings of $140 per month is too low.

Assuming a single mother with three children earns the maximum of $140 a month in addition to FBA ($1,084) she receives a total of $1,224 monthly; $237 goes toward the shelter subsidy, leaving her with $987, or $32.45 a day. This must cover additional housing expenses, food, clothes, transportation, school costs, insurance, dental expenses, telephone, entertainment, vitamins and other medication not covered under the Drug Benefit Plan, laundry, personal hygiene products and miscellaneous expenses for three people.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

That the current social assistance system be revised to build in adequate employment incentive programs for sole support mothers, by:

(i) increasing the earnings limit per month to reflect the number of children in the family and the standard of living in each region;

(ii) introducing a program so that sole support mothers can gradually be taken off social assistance (ie. receive medical benefits, full housing subsidy, employment related expenses, subsidy for childcare, transportation allowance etc...);

that the provincial government negotiate with the federal government to make child support payments non-taxable.

BATTERED WOMEN

One in 10 women in Canada is abused by her partner.

A victim of abuse is hesitant to call the police for various reasons, among them: shame, fear of further abuse, fear of being alone and supporting her children, unfamiliarity with the court system and not knowing where to turn for help.

Many assaulted women blame themselves for the abuse they suffer and cover up for their spouse believing that they can help their husband and save their marriage.

While we understand that the police have a directive from the Attorney General's office to lay charges where "reasonable and probable grounds exist", there was some concern expressed by the sole support mothers at the conference about its enforcement.

The final decision for laying charges is at the discretion of the officer. A police officer who has received little training in the area of wife assault may respond to the situation poorly. The police must lay charges without deliberation or moralizing.

More public education programs, increasing the number of charges laid against wife batterers, mandatory counselling for abusers and more available services will allow for more victims to speak up.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that the government ensure that services for psychologically abused women and children be made available by increasing funds to transition houses specifically for this purpose;

that the government provide funds to ensure that mandatory counselling for batterers is implemented;

that the Solicitor General establish Domestic Response Units across the province;

that provincially funded programs be established to educate health care workers to better understand experiences battered women face;

that more broadly based training programs for police officers in the area of spousal assault, be implemented.

CHILDCARE

There is a lack of quality, affordable and available childcare in Ontario. At present, only 10% of children requiring care are actually being served by the system. The current childcare program does not benefit the needs of shift-workers or part-time workers (the majority of whom are women); and childcare for irregular hours or emergency situations is not available.

The insufficient number of subsidized childcare spaces means that many sole support mothers must forego job possibilities and remain on social assistance until their children are in school full days.

However, enrolment in school full day does not eliminate childcare needs altogether. Often, childcare is required after school until the mother returns home from work.

Childcare subsidies are essential for single mothers if they must enter the hospital, rehabilitation centres or treatment centres; yet subsidies are not available.

For sole support mothers to achieve full equality within our society, childcare must be accessible to all those who need it.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that all hospitals, community centres, schools, universities, colleges and businesses be encouraged through financial incentives, to provide on-site childcare services;

that the government fund and/or subsidize the development of 24 hour childcare centres;

that more spaces for infants be made available in childcare centres;

that businesses be encouraged through financial incentives, to provide time off for the illness of a child;

that the government provide funding for childcare services to on-going support groups through grants or subsidies;

that the government develop childcare programs for ill children. The program could be modelled after services that are currently available, such as "Chicken Soup" in the United States.

EDUCATION

Sole support mothers face many barriers in their attempt to return to school; the greatest restrictions being lack of financial resources, inadequate childcare and low self-esteem.

Once in school, sole support mothers must deal with other built in disincentives such as finding the energy and the quiet time to study. If the children are young, who entertains them while mother tries to get some work done? Where does she find a quiet spot to study if she lives in a very small apartment? When does she study if she works all day, goes to school in the evenings and is solely responsible for the care of her children?

Futher, many sole support mothers at the conference explained that they are not informed about educational programs available.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that barriers to education for sole support mothers receiving O.S.A.P be removed by:

(i) increasing the grant limit;

(ii) removing the restrictions on the grant eligibility periods;

(iii) not penalizing part-time students by inappropriate use of grant eligibility periods and for having attended post secondary institutions in the past;

(iv) the expansion of entry level support programs for mature students offering information on time management, student work skills such as exam writing, reading skills, essay preparation, library resources and so on;

that the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities keep social workers and community relations workers up-to-date on educational programs so that the information can be passed on to their client group;

that the new Spousal Support Payment Enforcement Act be publicized to the appropriate people through the media, social workers, community relations workers, legal aid clinics or be included with FBA and GWA cheques;

that legal information be publicized on a very basic level and be made available through social agencies, courts, legal aid clinics, the Attorney General, media campaigns, the ministries of Housing and Community and Social Services etc..;

that social workers be provided with a variety of information pamphlets, such as addiction awareness, community resources, educational upgrading etc... which are likely to be of assistance to sole support mothers;

that a major education campaign be established using every possible medium, especially television, on issues relating to alcohol and drug addiction, abuse, illiteracy, upgrading education, self-help groups etc.;

that the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities work together to ensure that sole support mothers are made fully aware of all educational options available to them, through:

(i) information mailings with FBA cheques;

(ii) a combined newsletter outlining educational opportunities available and information on new Social Service programs for sole support mothers.

EMPLOYMENT

Sole support mothers who are currently out of the labour force face many barriers to employment: lack of experience, educational qualifications, low self-esteem, the lack of affordable quality childcare and the cost of holding a job.

For sole support mothers who are in the labour force in low paying jobs, one way of improving their chances to earn more money and secure a better job is to upgrade their education. However, returning to school means leaving the labour force or attending classes part-time in the evening. It also means having the confidence to return to school after being away for a lengthy period of time.

Quitting the labour force is not a viable option, for obvious reasons. However, part-time evening classes means finding affordable childcare, spending more money on transportation etc...

Sole support mothers on social assistance are often restricted from entering the labour force because of the high cost of childcare in Ontario.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that the Ministry of Community and Social Services re-examine the phase-out policy for the Social Services Employment Program;

that the Ministry of Community and Social Services take immediate action to increase the earnings limit per month for sole support mothers on social assistance to reflect the number of children in the family and the standard of living in each region;

that the Ministry of Community and Social Services recognize the monetary difficulties for sole support mothers during the transition period from social assistance to employment and continue benefit coverage, housing subsidy, adding transportation allowance etc..;

that the Ministry of Community and Social Services expand the Social Services Employment Program to include agencies that are in receipt of <u>any</u> government funding and that this program be extended to the private sector.

HEALTH

Health care is a basic human right, and must be available to everyone regardless of income, sex, ethnicity, etc... Yet barriers do exist.

Poverty is the single-most important factor in the perpetuation of ill health in our society.

Almost half of all sole support mothers earn below $10,000 annually. Vitamins, food supplements and alternative health care which are often necessities to many of these women and their children, are not accessible because of the cost.

Health promotion efforts are often recommended as solutions to poor health. It is important to recognize that true health promotion involves social solutions for social ills (such as poor working conditions and an unclean environment). It is insufficient to be recommending only individual solutions such as exercising and eating well.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that vitamins and other food supplements essential to health maintenance be covered by the Drug Benefit Plan;

that the provincial government take immediate action to increase the $20 pregnancy supplement to welfare cheques to reflect the high costs associated with child bearing;

that dental coverage include anaesthetics, x-rays, root canals etc.;

that at least as much money for health promotion/wellness and disease prevention be allocated as is for dealing with illness (in general) in our society;

that mental health services in isolated areas in Ontario be improved to better respond to the varying needs of all women;

that the government increase funding in the program areas of prevention in public health, family support and child welfare services.

HOUSING

Lack of adequate and affordable housing is a reality for many single mothers in Ontario.

Subsidized housing often requires a two or three year waiting period. These units are, in most cases, only available in public housing complexes which ultimately results in ghettoizing and stigma.

Public housing complexes were described as cockroach infested, unclean, and poorly maintained by many of the sole support mothers who attended the conference. They explained how difficult it is to keep their units clean, when their building in general is unkempt.

Terms like "drug haven" and "criminal activity" were used by some of the sole support mothers when they described the public housing complexes they live in.

Sole support mothers living in non-subsidized housing are often forced to pay anywhere from 40% to 60% of their income for housing alone. Paying such a high portion of their income for rent often means choosing between feeding their children or paying for shelter.

HOUSING IS A RIGHT, NOT A LUXURY!

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that a complete review of Ontario Housing policies be implemented with tenant involvement (similar to the Social Assistance Review Committee);

that social assistance payments have a higher shelter component and that it reflect the cost of housing in each specific region;

that subsidized housing units be established in private apartment buildings;

that subsidies be based on net income and not gross income;

that single mothers not be evicted from Ontario Housing when their youngest child reaches 18 years of age and is out of school;

that consideration be taken when choosing the location of new Ontario Housing developments to ensure that they are not constructed in areas close to hazardous chemicals and pollutants;

that co-op childcare centres be established within public housing complexes;

that single mothers qualify for public housing as soon as pregnancy is detected;

that community relations workers facilitate the development of residential tenants groups to ensure cleanliness, maintenance, upkeep, regular spraying, etc... of public housing buildings;

that care be taken to ensure that ghettoizing does not occur in low rental and public housing complexes;

that free laundry facilities be provided within public housing complexes;

that community relations workers be given lighter caseloads to reinforce a more positive relationship with their client group;

that community relations workers facilitate the development of self-help groups, information sessions etc...;

that first and last months' rent be part of the housing subsidy in social assistance cheques.

OPENING THE LINES OF COMMUNICATIONS

The relationship between social workers and their client group is often a rocky one. The overwhelming caseload for social workers and the high needs of their clients creates situations that often result in hostility, anger and misunderstanding.

Great pressure is put on the social workers to help sole support mothers and to respond to their enquiries, complaints and needs, while following the rules and keeping within the guidelines of the law.

Further, to help create a more positive relationship between social workers and their client group, there is a need for hiring and training more native and multi-cultural staff in the income maintenance service .

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that the relationship between social service workers and clients be positively reinforced by:

(i) income maintenance workers receiving reduced workloads/caseloads and in turn completing mandatory training to upgrade skills and program information;

(ii) more effective service to native clients by the hiring and training of native staff in income maintenance services;

(iii) more effective service to clients with differing cultural backgrounds by the hiring and training of multi-cultural staff in income maintenance services;

that communication between the social assistance delivery system and clients regarding eligibility and programs be improved. This may be accomplished by bulletins for newsletters mailed with GWA and FBA cheques, availability of workshops, central phone numbers, and complete information packages for clients;

that the government establish a hotline to deal with enquiries from sole support mothers.

STEREOTYPING

When one thinks of sole support mothers two different images pop into mind. Both images are developed from the way single mothers are portrayed in the media---specifically television.

The first image is that of a sole support mother who easily finds and handles a job, takes care of her children, goes on trips, can find housing, clothes and food, while not worrying where food for the next meal will come from.

The second image is that of a "welfare bum" whose only goal is to cheat the government. She is illustrated as caring little for her children, being unconcerned about cleanliness, health and nutrition.

Television portrays unrealistic pictures of sole support mothers and strengthens the stereotypes that the public believes as truth.

The result is that society has a distorted picture of the realities of life for sole support mothers.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that the government fund a campaign to increase the social awareness and educate the public in regard to the realities of life for sole support mothers;

that judges, lawyers, doctors and other professional disciplines be educated about all women, including, sole support mothers, lesbian women, disabled women, immigrant and visible minority women, aboriginal women and that principals, teachers, daycare workers etc... be trained to deal with the special emotional and social needs of children of sole support mothers;

that the CRTC continue its commitment to eliminate sex-role stereotyping in all media.

TRANSITION HOUSES

The needs of battered women are not being met because of the inadequate number of transition houses in Ontario.

The maximum allowable stay in the transition house is 6-8 weeks. Once this period has passed, women are left with few options and so many are forced to return to the abusive environments from which they fled.

Children who are exposed to abusive environments often require counselling. This counselling is rarely available at the transition house.

Many women are forced to stay in abusive situations because of the inadequate number of transition houses, the high cost of housing and the absence of second stage housing.

The Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends:

that the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Community and Social Services take immediate action to build second stage housing across the province;

that the Ministry of Community and Social Services provide funding to build more shelters to reflect the number of women and children who seek help;

that transition houses receive increased funding so that counselling services for children can be available;

that a clear definition of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Community and Social Services in regards to transition houses be established.